

## **Decision Record**

### **Southern Arizona Project: Vehicle Barriers, Route Restoration, and Trash Cleanups**

NEPA No.: DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2013-0002-DNA

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Sonoran Desert National Monument

#### **Purpose and Need for the Action**

The purpose of the project proposal is to provide protection of the wilderness values of the Table Top Wilderness and of monument objects of the Sonoran Desert National Monument (SDNM). The SDNM was designated by Presidential Proclamation 7397, which mandates protection of monument objects, including wildlife, vegetation, and cultural resources. The Table Top Wilderness was established by the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990, which added it to the National Wilderness Preservation System. The National Wilderness Preservation System was established by Wilderness Act of 1964, which prohibits motorized travel within wilderness boundaries.

The need stems from increased vehicle incursions, proliferation of vehicle routes and foot trails, and accumulations of trash related to illegal human and drug smuggling. The project intends to clean-up the accumulations of trash and restore illegal vehicle routes, foot paths, and other areas of disturbance to as near a natural condition as possible. This project is part of a larger BLM strategy to improve resource conditions within the Table Top Wilderness and SDNM to remove trash and improve natural and cultural resource values.

This project will provide for the installation of several vehicle barriers, reclaim illegal vehicle routes and footpaths used during the course of human and drug smuggling, and clean-up dispersed litter and trash accumulations. The work will occur in the Table Top Wilderness and adjacent areas of the Sonoran Desert National Monument. The project will gather, bag, and remove trash accumulations from illicit “layup” (or camp and hiding) sites used by smugglers, as well as dispersed litter along designated vehicle routes and washes. Route restoration will take place following conclusion of clean-up activities and may involve use of a backhoe and/or hand tools and “vertical mulching” techniques to obscure routes.

This clean-up effort will take place from December 1, 2012 through May 31, 2013. During the course of the project, access to wilderness by motor vehicle may be used, but is not anticipated. Past projects have located and removed large quantities of debris and smuggling trash deep inside the Table Top Wilderness, which required the use of motor vehicles both for law enforcement and project work. Such large concentrations have not been identified for this project; however, scattered debris remains and may require occasional vehicle use for removal. It is estimated that during this period up to two vehicle incursions into wilderness may occur per day in areas with the most trash and refuse. In rare instances, aircraft may be utilized for sling-load removal of very large trash loads and/or areas that are difficult to access.

Vehicle barriers have been identified for several locations where smugglers gain access to the Table Top Wilderness or adjacent areas of the SDNM and have created unauthorized vehicle routes during the course of criminal smuggling activities. These locations are identified on the attached map. These sites are in addition to locations identified during the course of last year's operations (NEPA # DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2011-007-DNA). The BLM believes that barriers located on the Tohono O'odham Nation lands (#3) and the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range (#4) would be effective in reducing the incidence of illegal smuggling on those lands and adjacent public lands managed by the BLM. These barriers would not be constructed without prior consultation and approval by authorized officials of those land management jurisdictions. If barrier #4 is not constructed, the BLM would propose constructing three barriers on nearby public lands to cut-off illegal traffic in this area. One barrier located to the southwest of Antelope Peak (#1) on the western boundary of the Table Top Wilderness may require an extension of approximately 700 feet into wilderness to be effective. See the attached map and table for descriptions of site specific projects.

Waste within the Table Top wilderness and adjacent areas of the Sonoran Desert National Monument will typically consist of clothes, back packs, abandoned vehicles, bicycles, plastic trash bags, and gasoline containers. In most cases, motorized access to dump sites will utilize existing smuggling routes and washes. As areas are cleaned of trash/refuse, the unauthorized smuggling routes will be remediated by ripping of illegal routes, vertical mulching, and re-vegetation.

## **Plan Conformance**

The proposed action is in conformance with the *Sonoran Desert National Monument Record of Decision & Approved Resource Management Plan* because it is specifically provided for in the following decisions:

- TM-6.1.1: The use of motorized or mechanized vehicles off designated roads or primitive roads will be prohibited.

- PS-1.1: Identify naturally occurring or manmade public safety hazards on public lands and take appropriate action to protect public health and safety.
- PS-2.1: Investigate all reported hazardous-materials and solid-wastes sites. Plan necessary containment and/or cleanup responses on a case-by-case basis as soon as possible upon report.

### **Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, and Finding of No Significant Impact**

The proposed action is both a feature of, and essentially similar to, both action alternatives analyzed by “Table Top Wilderness Protection and Vehicle Barrier Project, Environmental Assessment No. DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2010-0004-EA” completed in October, 2010. The project is within the same analysis area, and will involve essentially the same type and amount of work.

The BLM, Sonoran Desert National Monument, has completed a review of the proposed action with respect to the above-cited environmental analysis. This review (“Documentation of NEPA Adequacy, NEPA No. DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2013-0001-DNA”) determined that there were no substantive differences in the actions proposed and potential resultant impacts, nor was there new information or circumstances that would render the existing analysis invalid.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the environmental analysis (NEPA No. DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2010-0004-EA) and the subsequent review (NEPA No. DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2013-0001-DNA), attached to and incorporated herein; public involvement throughout the development of the analysis; and all other information available to me, it is my determination that impacts are not expected to be significant; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

### **Persons Consulted**

Lower Sonoran Field Office staff at November NEPA meeting

### **Decision and Rationale on Action**

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the activities associated with the proposed action of the “Southern Arizona Project: Vehicle Barriers, Route Restoration, and Trash Cleanups” project as described above and in the attached map and table of project descriptions.

Implementation of this project will serve to protect wilderness values of the Table Top Wilderness by acting to restore naturalness and solitude, and will serve to protect natural and cultural objects of the Sonoran Desert National Monument.

The following applicable stipulations and mitigation measures from the “Table Top Wilderness Protection and Vehicle Barrier Project, Environmental Assessment No. DOI-BLM-AZ-P040-2010-0004-EA” will be included as conditions of implementation:

### **General Stipulations**

- Work will be conducted in the daylight hours to the extent practicable. Nighttime construction activities would not be conducted.
- The disposal of solid and/or hazardous wastes is not authorized on the SDNM.
- Wherever possible, rather than clearing vegetation, equipment and vehicles shall use existing surfaces or previously disturbed areas.
- Existing roads shall be used for travel and equipment storage whenever possible. Equipment will not be stored at the project location.
- The project area will contain adequate signage to indicate which BLM routes are open and which routes are closed.

### **Biological Resources Stipulations**

- Any temporarily disturbed soils will be stabilized and/or revegetated with native tree and shrub species, including mesquite and Palo Verde at washes/arroyos, to provide erosion and sedimentation control as necessary. Post-construction stabilization of eroding areas will be required where fencing and ground disturbance results in accelerated erosion. This may include reseeding, water bars or other treatment as necessary.

### **Cultural Resources Stipulations**

- Any cultural and/or paleontological resources (historic or prehistoric site or object) discovered during project activities shall be immediately reported to the authorized officer. The BLM shall suspend all operations in the immediate area of such discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery shall be made by the authorized officer to determine the appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. The BLM shall be responsible for the cost of the evaluation and any decision as to the proper mitigation measures would be made by the authorized officer.
- As required under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act at 43 CFR10.4(g), “If in connection with the project operations under this authorization, any human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects or objects of cultural patrimony as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101-601; 104 Stat. 3048; 25 U.S.C. 3001) are discovered, the ROW holder shall stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect the remains and objects, and immediately notify the Authorized Officer of the discovery.

## **Implementation Date**

This action shall be effective for the period December 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013.

//signed//  
Richard B. Hanson, Manager  
Sonoran Desert National Monument

11-14-2012  
Date

## **Administrative Review of Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal per the procedures at 43 CFR 4.410-4.415. An appeal may be accompanied by a petition for stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.21, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted below, within 30 days following receipt of this decision:

Bureau of Land Management  
Sonoran Desert National Monument  
ATTN: Richard B. Hanson, Manager  
21605 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Phoenix, AZ 85027

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant feels that the decision here is in error.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4.21(b)(1) a petition for stay, if filed, must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
- (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted.
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

## **Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision contact Rich Hanson, Manager, or David Scarbrough, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Sonoran Desert National Monument; 21605 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue; Phoenix, AZ 85027; (623) 580-5500.

***Project Descriptions - Southern Arizona Project: Vehicle Barriers, Route Restoration, and Trash Cleanups.***

Map Location	Project Description	Comments
<b>Vehicle Barriers</b>		
1	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier at wilderness boundary; total length approximately 1,150 feet; up to 750 feet in wilderness.	This barrier would close the western access to a smuggling corridor that passes along the southern base of Antelope Peak. Although through traffic was halted with a barrier constructed near Antelope Peak in 2011, there still are vehicle attempts being made in wilderness at this location. A short barrier will be attempted first; if ineffective, an extension into wilderness would be required.
2	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length approximately 450 feet.	Requires approval of Tohono O'odham Nation.
3	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length approximately 500 feet.	Requires approval of U.S. Air Force.
4	"Normandy"-style vehicle barriers (3); total length up to approximately 2000 feet.	To be constructed if #3 is not approved. Three barriers would be required on public lands to cut-off vehicle traffic through this area.
5	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length approximately 80 feet.	This barrier would block vehicle access to the Table Top Wilderness and Tohono O'odham Nation via a large wash to the south of the Table Top Trailhead.
6	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length up to approximately 500 feet.	This barrier would block vehicle access to the Lava Flow Trail. It would be located approximately 100 yards within the wilderness boundary near the Lava Flow South Trailhead. In concert with construction of the vehicle barrier, a front-end loader would be used to replace the boulder vehicle obstructions that have been removed from the Lava Flow Trail by smugglers using the trail as a vehicle route.
7	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length	Located on wilderness boundary. Would block vehicle access to Table Top Wilderness

	approximately 135 feet.	via a large wash north of Black Mountain Well.
8	"Normandy"-style vehicle barrier; total length approximately 135 feet.	Located across Vekol Wash just north of private land.
9	"Normandy"-style vehicle barriers (2); total length approximately 210 feet.	Would block vehicle access to a large wash south of the White Hills.
<b>Route Restoration</b>		
10	Illegally constructed smuggling route in western part of Vekol Valley extending from Tohono O'odham Nation to BLM Route 8007F.	Approximately 5 miles.
11	BLM Route 8007I.	Approximately 1.5 miles.
12	BLM Route 8007G (part).	Approximately 3 miles.
13	BLM Route 8007F (part).	Approximately 3 miles.
14	BLM Route 8027E (part).	Approximately 1.5 miles.
15	BLM Route 8027E (part), BLM Route 8027F (part).	Approximately 1.5 miles.
16	BLM Route 8054A.	Approximately 2 miles.

17	BLM Route 8054B.	Approximately 1.5 miles.
18	BLM Routes 8044A, 8044B.	Approximately 2 miles.
19	BLM Route 8042D.	Approximately 1 mile.
20	BLM Routes 8028B, 8028C, 8028D.	Approximately 3.5 miles.
<b>Boundary with Tohono O’odham Nation</b>		
21-22	Fence repair and cattleguard installation.	Fence remains down due to passage of vehicles. Cattleguards would keep the fence intact, thus helping to restrict livestock movement from the Tohono O’odham nation to public lands.
23-24	Fence repair and cattleguard installation.	If route decommissioning and restoration described above is not effective in deterring smuggling traffic, cattleguards would be installed in an attempt to keep impacts localized.